

Message Text

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ACTION HEW-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 AID-05 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03 TRSE-00 XMB-02

OPIC-03 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 FEA-01 CEQ-01

ERDA-05 EPA-01 IO-13 NSF-01 OES-07 INT-05 /120 W

-----090914 120214Z /75

R 111805Z NOV 77

FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO AMEMBASSY LONDON

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 8401

AMEMBASSY BONN

USIA WASHINGTON

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LONDON PASS SECRETARY CALIFANO

SECSTATE PASS HEW

USIA FOR IEU

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: OVIP, SGEN, IT

SUBJECT: VISIT OF HEW SECRETARY CALIFANO-ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

REFS: A-HOHMAN/WHITING TELECON: B-ROME 18040

1. AS REQUESTED REF A, THERE FOLLOWS INFORMATION ON SENSITIVE ITALINA ISSUES AS BACKGROUND FOR SECRETARY CALIFANO'S PARTICIPATION AT THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION SCHEDULED FOR 1800 HOURS, NOVEMBER 22, ROME USIS LIBRARY.

2. ABORTION. PRESENT ITALIAN LAW ON ABORTION DATES BACK TO MUSSOLINI'S GOVERNMENT. UNDER EXISTING LAW, ABORTION IS A CRIME UNLESS IT CAN BE SHOWN THAT THE MOTHER'S LIFE IS IN DANGER. THERE IS LITTLE

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ENFORCEMENT OF THE LAW, HOWEVER, AND IT IS ESTIMATED THAT TENS OF THOUSANDS OF ITALIAN WOMEN HAVE ILLEGAL ABORTIONS EVERY YEAR. SINCE 1973, THE PARTIES OF THE LEFT (THE SOCIALISTS AND THE SMALL RADICAL PARTY, IN PARTICULAR) HAVE BEEN SEEKING A NEW LAW. AFTER PASSAGE IN THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES EARLY THIS YEAR, THE ITALIAN SENATE VOTED DOWN (BY ONE OR TWO VOTES) A SOCIALIST BILL THAT WOULD HAVE LEFT A

DECISION ON ABORTION LARGELY UP TO THE WOMAN. THE COMMUNIST PARTY, ALTHOUGH NOMINALLY IN FAVOR OF THE SOCIALIST BILL, HAS BEEN SOFT PEDALING THE ISSUE. THE GOVERNING CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, IN KEEPING WITH THEIR CATHOLIC ORIENTATION, FAVOR ONLY A SLIGHT LIBERALIZATION OF RESTRICTIONS ON ABORTION, RECENTLY THE RADICAL PARTY WAS SUCCESSFUL IN COLLECTING ENOUGH SIGNATURES TO FORCE A REFERENDUM OF THE ISSUE NEXT SPRING. IT APPEARS LIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT PARLIAMENT WILL ENACT THE SOCIALIST BILL WITH ONLY MINOR MODIFICATIONS, THEREBY KILLING THE REFERENCUM AND GIVING ITALY ONE OF THE OST LIBERAL OR PERMISSIVE ABORTION BILLS IN EUROPE.

3. HEALTH CARE. ALL WORKERS IN ITALY AND THEIR IMMEDIATE DEPENDENTS ENJOY SOME FORM OF HEALTH INSURANCE. INSURANCE PROGRAMS ARE CURRENTLY ADMINISTERED THROUGH A COMPLICATED NETWORK OF PAJWSTATAL AGENCIES. THE GOVERNMENT IS CONSIDERING A HEALTH REFORM PROGRAM THAT WOULD PLACE ALL INSURANCE PLANS UNDER ONE CENTRAL AGENCY, AS IN GREAT BRITAIN. UNTIL THIS REFORM IS PASSED, HOWEVER, THE PARASTATAL ORGANIZATIONS WHICH ADMINISTER THE PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN PLACED UNDER THE TEMPORARY CONTROL OF OFFICIALS IN THE VARIOUS REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS.

4. UNIVERSITY REFORM. ITALIAN UNIVERSITIES ARE IN TURMOIL TODAY, TURMOIL THAT STEMS FROM A WELL INTENTIONED BUT MISGUIDED UNIVERSITY "REFORM" OF THE EARLY-60'S. AT THAT TIME UNIVERSITIES IN ITALY WERE OPENED TO ALL STUDENTS COMPLETING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SECONDARY SCHOOL. THE AIM WAS TO END THE ALLEGEDLY ELITIST CHARACTER OF THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM AND TURN THE UNIVERSITIES INTO "SCHOOLS FOR THE MASSES". THE PROBLEM IS THAT THIS RADICAL STEP WAS TAKEN WITHOUT PROVIDING FOR TEACHERS AND CLASSROOMS TO ACCOMMODATE THE GREATLY INCREASED NUMBERS OF STUDENTS THE REFFORMS BROUGHT IN. THE RESULT IS SHOCKING OVERCROWDING OF UNIVERSITY FACILITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, BITTER ALIENATION OF THE STUDENTS WHILE THEY ARE IN SCHOOL AND DIFFICULTY OF FINDING JOBS WHEN THEY GRADUTATE. THE UNIVERSITIES HAVE THUS BECOME A BREEDING GROUND FOR EXTREMIST MOVEMENTS THAT REJECT ALL OF THE COUNTRY'S TRADITIONAL POLITICAL GROUPS, INCLUDING THE COMMUNISTS WHO HAVE BECOME A SPECIAL TARGET OF ATTACK. THE TOTAL UNIVERSITY POPULATION IS ABOUT 1 MILLION. THERE ARE 29 SATE UNIVERSITIES, 2 TECHNO-LOGICAL INSTITUTES, 2 ARCHITECTURAL INSTITUTES, 4 TEACHERS COLLEGES, AND A FEW OTHER HIGHER SCHOOLS IN SPECIAL CATEGORIES. THE GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF UNIVERSITIES S UNEVEN, WITH

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MANY UNIVERSITIES IN THE NORTH AND FEW IN MOST PARTS OF THE SOUTH (THE MEZZOGIORNO). THE PROBLEMS OF ITALIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS ARE ONLY RELATIVELY LESS SERIOUS THAN THOSE OF THE UNIVERSITIES. PARENTS WHO CAN AFFORD IT SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS, PARTICULARLY IN URBAN AREAS.

5. YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT. ACCORDING TO THE LATEST STATISTICS, THERE ARE MORE THAN A MILLION AND A HALF UNEMPLOYED IN ITALY TODAY. OVER A MILLION OF THESE PEOPLE ARE YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN BETWEEN THE AGES OF 14 AND 29. OF THESE YOUNG UNEMPLOYED, MORE THAN ONE-THIRD HAVE A SECONDARY SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR A UNIVERSITY DEGREE. THIS PAST SUMMER, THE GOVERNMENT, THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF LABOR, INVITED YOUNG PEOPLE TO ENROLL IN A SPECIAL PROGRAM AIMED AT PROVIDING THEM WITH TEMPORARY WORK. EARLY 650,000 APPLIED, AND NOW THE GOVERNMENT IS CONFRONTING THE DIFFICULT TASK OF FINDING JOBS FOR THEM IN AN ECONOMY THAT IS NEARLY STAGNANT.

6. PENSIONS. IN SEPTEMBER, THE GOVERNMENT INTRODUCED A BILL THAT

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WOULD HAVE REDUCED PENSION BENEFITS OF THOSE NOT PRESENTLY AFFECTED WHO CONTINUE TO EARN SOME REMUNERATION (WHAT WE WOULD CALL "DOUBLE DIPPING"). IF FELT THE NEED TO TAKE THIS STEP BECAUSE OF THE EXTREMELY HIGH OPERATING DEFICIT OF THE PENSION

AGENCIES. THE BILL WAS RECEIVED WITH MUCH CRITICISM BY THE LABOR UNIONS (WHO CALIAMED NOT TO HAVE BEEN CONSULTED IN ADVANCE) BUT WAS WITHDRAWN BECAUSE OF OPPOSITIONBY THE DEMOCRATIC CHRISTIAN (DC) PARTY ITSELF, WHICH SAW MUCH OF ITS POLITICAL BASE ADVERSELY AFFECTED. THE GOVERNMENT HAS PROMISED TO MODITY THE PROPOSAL BEFORE RESUBMITTING IT, AND THE UNIONS THEMSELVS ARE WORKING ON THEIR OWN PROPOSAL.

7. ENVIRONMENT/INDUSTRIAL POLLUTION. IN THE SUMMER OF 1976, A CHEMICAL PLANT OWNED BY A SWISS-BASED MULTINATIOAL IN THE TOWN OF SEVESO, EAR MILAN, RELEASED INTO THE ATMOSPHERE DANGEROUS QUANTITIES OF DEADLY DIOXINE. THE TOWN AND NEIGHBORING AREA HAD TO BE EVACUATED AND DECONTAMINATED. ONLY RECENTLY HAVE SOME OF THE SEVESO FAMILIES BEEN PERMITTED TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMES. THE INCIDENT HAS BECOME A CAUSE CELEBRE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT IN IALY AND A SYMBOL OF WHAT THE LEFT CLAIMS IS ITALY'S "COLONIAL SUBJUGATION" TO THE MULTINATIONS. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES INCLUDE THE MOVEMENT TO PRESERVE HISTORIC CENTER CITIES AND EFFORTS TO GUARD REAL ESTATE SPECULATIN, PARTICULARLY ALONG ITALY'S MAGNIFICENT COASTLINE.HOLMES

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Message Attributes

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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
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